

STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 807, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY TO DETERMINE THE FEASIBILITY AND SUITABILITY OF ESTABLISHING A MEMORIAL TO THE SPACE SHUTTLE *COLUMBIA* IN THE STATE OF TEXAS AND FOR ITS INCLUSION AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 807, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study to determine the feasibility and suitability of establishing a memorial to the Space Shuttle *Columbia* in the State of Texas and for its inclusion as a unit of the National Park System.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 807. The Department testified on April 28, 2005, that we could not support S. 242, a similar bill in the 109th Congress that would have designated the areas covered in this bill as units of the National Park System. At that time we recommended to the subcommittee that the bill be amended to authorize the Secretary to study the sites to determine if they are suitable and feasible as additions to the National Park System.

We appreciate that H.R. 807 would authorize such a study. A study would provide the opportunity to consult with other agencies and organizations, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), to determine what other commemorative

efforts have been undertaken to memorialize the space shuttle *Columbia* as well as taking into account the wishes and desires of the crew's families regarding how they would like their loved ones remembered. A study also would look at a variety of alternatives that could include National Park Service (NPS) management or could focus on administering the site through State or local governments or private organizations.

Studies of this type typically take approximately three years to complete after funds are made available and cost between \$300,000 and \$500,000. Also, priority should be given to the 37 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic River System that have not yet been transmitted to the Congress.

H.R. 807 would direct the Secretary to study areas in the Texas cities of Nacogdoches, Hemphill, Lufkin and San Augustine. Large amounts of debris from the *Columbia* were found on the parcels specified in the bill, a combination of public and private land, and the Lufkin civic center served as NASA's command center for retrieval efforts. As a part of the study, the Secretary is also authorized to recommend additional sites in Texas for establishment of memorials to *Columbia*.

Columbia, the first space shuttle to orbit the earth, was NASA's oldest shuttle. On the morning of February 1, 2003, after a three-week mission devoted to scientific and medical experiments, the *Columbia* began its return to earth. As re-entry into the earth's atmosphere

continued over the Pacific, problems were noticed by NASA, contact with the shuttle was lost, and it began to break apart. Debris from the shuttle was observed from California to Louisiana, however the remains of the seven astronauts and the most significant parts of the shuttle were found in several communities across Texas. Soon after the crash, an independent accident investigation board was established and the first volume of the board's findings was issued in August 2003, identifying the factors that led to the shuttle disaster and making recommendations for future actions.

Many memorials and remembrances have been established in honor of *Columbia's* crew, including a memorial at Arlington Cemetery and on Devon Island in the Canadian High Arctic. Asteroids have been named for members of the crew, as has a highway in Washington and an elementary school in California. On May 12, 2004, NASA dedicated its new "Altix" supercomputer to the memory of Kalpana "KC" Chawla, flight engineer and mission specialist on the *Columbia*.

An NPS suitability and feasibility study would determine how, or if, this proposal would complement or add to those already established memorials.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.